The Resolution of A Case of Conscience, wherein some Persons of Piety and Sincerity seem to be at a loss.

Viz.

The Case. *Whether, as matters now stand, it be lawful to frequent our Parish-Churches for Communion in Divine Worship?*

BEfore I give the *Solution*, I must crave leave to premise these things. 1*ly*, That I intend not all this time to concern my self with those, whose Eyes the God of this World has blinded, and if I neglected them altogether, perhaps I had a good warrant from him, who was best able to give it, who bids us *Not cast Pearls before Swine*, adding a cautionary reason to this effect, That all the reward from them for such profuseness will be to cause them to turn again and rent us. My design is to give some satisfaction to those, who do not approve of some of the Prayers, and yet think that not to be a sufficient cause to break off from their Communion, and therefore I shall spare the pains of proving the thing (though it were be any Rules of right or wrong, nothing admits a clearer proof) and shall only argue upon their own Concessions. 2*dly*, I shall proceed purely upon Ecclesiastical grounds, not at all intermeddling with Secular affairs. 3*dly*, That they would not at first therefore judge me as a man in my opinion inclinable to the extreams, till they have considered upon my Reasons, whether I have not Truth and Justice on my side the Apostacy of a multitude, which few have courage to stand against, may make that seem to be an extream, which is none in it self; and to allow it so, were to give up a Righteous Cause; and if the very mention of some things seem so harsh and grating, consider what are the Evils themselves.

These things thus premised, I answer plainly and directly, That it is not lawful, as matters now stand, to joyn in Communion in our Parish-Churches. The Personal faults of men, though they

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may give too great cauſe of diſguſt, and chill the zeal of Communicants, yet they do not directly affect Communion, nor afford a Sufficient ground of Seperation: But then I add, that wherein any part of the matter, wherein they Communicate, is unlawful and ſinful; and the Perſons preſent at ſuch Communion do either actually joyn, or by the nature of the thing are ſuppoſed and required to joyn in Communion, there it is neceſſary to depart, and come out from among ſuch, if you will not be partakers in their Sins. I need not inſiſt upon the proof of this Propoſition: it is ſo ſelf-evident, that not only he, who writes *Meaſures of Obedience*, but alſo he, who diſcourſeth of the *Unreaſonableneſs* of a new Seperation, will grant it; they both and their whole Party have ever (and truly not without cauſe) exploded ſinful Terms of Communion: It only remains therefore to prove, that there is ſuch unlawful or ſinful matter, and that by the nature of the thing all Perſons there preſent for Communion in Worſhip are required and ſuppoſed to joyn in it, and then the Concluſion will unavoidably follow, That as matters now ſtand, it is not lawful to frequent our Pariſh-Churches for Communion in Divine Worſhip: And as to the Perſons, with whom I am concerned, the readieſt way to clear this point, will be to anſwer their Objections or Doubts, which I ſhall ſtate as fully and fairly as I can; and if I neglect any thing, I hope they will not think much to give me fuller Information, it being only their good and ſatisfaction which I deſign.

Obj. 1ſt. Thoſe, with whom I have to do, will ſay, *That the former Member of my Propoſition they readily grant, and do think it contrary to Truth and Juſtice to Communicate in ſome of the Prayers*: But then they add, *That they neither do, nor ought to be ſuppoſed to joyn in thoſe Prayers*. And to prove this, They ſay, *That their Opinion and Judgment herein is notoriouſly known, That their behaviour at the reciting ſuch Prayers is not as at other times, but ſuch as gives ſufficient Teſtimony to all Perſons, that they joyn not in them*; Nay, further ſome urge, *That they have made their open Proteſtations and Declarations, That they neither do, nor will joyn in them as matters now are; and that their Intention is to joyn no further in the Prayers, then as they are approved on both ſides*. And all this I believe they ſpeak unfeignedly; but leſt good men unawares ſhould be led away with the Error of the Wicked, I beſeech them impartially to conſider theſe ſeveral things, which I ſhall return in anſwer.

Anſw. 1ſt, It is rarely thought adviſeable for men to forſake their

Friends, that they may run into the Mouthes of their Enemies: and therefore it may be worth their while to consider, whom they desert, and upon whom they cast themselves. They leave those, against whose Principles and Communion they Object nothing, and they joyn with those, whose Principles they disallow, and who are contrary to them in this very thing: for they are of opinion, (and so far they are in the right) That Communion ought to be entire; and therefore for your singular Behaviour and Testimonies of dissent, they look upon you with an ill Eye, plainly condemn you, and call you hard Names; and though they forbear further proceedings at present, to the end, that they may draw you off and break us; yet you may assure your selves, that as soon as ever opportunity presents, they will suffer you no longer, but force you at least to a visible and seeming compliance and consent, which will have this effect, either to necessitate you to a departure from them too late, or by yielding contrary to your declared judgment, to become worse *hypocrites* then themselves. And if this be not a good Argument against your present Practice, I am confident it can be no strong motive to it.

2*d*. The Consequences also of this practice ought to be well considered: for if men may pick and choose, take and refuse in Communion at their own pleasure, we have lost one great Argument against the *Romanists*, and you will be hard put to it to make your defence, either why you left the *Mass* at first, or do not go to it now. For the Common Reason all along alledged, was not, that there were not many excellent things in it, but that there were some so grosly bad, that we could not joyn in them; which will be no Reason at all, if in Communion we can take the good, and leave the evil.

3*d*. The Scandal also of this Practice is not to be slighted; for by your Example you draw many persons into that Communion, which they do not greatly approve, and in which otherwise they would not joyn. If you say, The Scandal is taken, not given: I answer, That if your practice be not justifiable (which presently I shall directly prove) then it is Scandal given, not barely taken; and consequently their Sin will in a great measure lie at your doors.

4*th*. This Practice is very absurd and inconsistent with it self. For your Profession to God and your Protestation before men, are directly contrary to each other. To men you say peremptorily, that you neither approve nor joyn in some certain Prayers: and yet after those Prayers, and in the very conclusion of your Prayers, you profess to God, and give him thanks for it too, That with one accord

you have made your common Supplications to him. I am unwilling to call this Lying to God, but it will concern you well to reconcile it.

5th. Your Proteſtation can here take no place; becauſe both it and your practice is againſt the very nature of Communion. A man may as lawfully take the *Oaths* with a Declaration, and communicate with a Proteſtation; both are *contra factum*. For as a man's Declaration (though he declare never ſo fully) will not excuſe him from Perjury in the matter of an Oath, if he deviate from the true Senſe of it; becauſe, let his meaning be what it will, the nature of an Oath requires that it be taken in the ſenſe of the Impoſer, whoſe Security it is: So neither will any man's Proteſtation, where he appears as a Member of the Communion, avail him againſt any part of it; becauſe the nature of Communion requires that it be entire. But becauſe the main ſtreſs in this particular ſeems to relie on this Reaſon, I will not run away with it for granted, but confirm it with further Arguments.

Firſt then; The Miniſter is the Mouth of the People, and in theirs as well as his own Name, doth he put up the Prayers to God Almighty; if therefore you be there as a Member of Communion, he is your Mouth, and you muſt be ſuppoſed to go along with him.

Secondly; The Prayers are therefore formed and ſtated, that you may know wherein you communicate, and accept them as Terms of Communion; and therefore if they will maintain their Communion, they muſt either exclude you, or you reject them, if you accept not their Terms: for otherwiſe I cannot conceive how *Eccleſiaſtical Communion* can be maintained. It is one great Reaſon, which we urge againſt the *extempore men*, that thoſe of their Society can ſcarce be ſaid to joyn in Communion with them; for either they communicate not at all, or elſe in they know not what, and at all adventures in what ever comes next the *Enthuſiaſticks* Tongues end; which is ſuch an abſolute Reſignation of themſelves, ſuch a pinning their Faith upon the Sleeves of their pretended Miniſter, as I think cannot be truly charged on the moſt groſly ignorant *Papiſt*. And your way does not much mend the matter; for if you take and leave as you liſt, no man can be certain what you communicate in.

Thirdly; The Church declares and preſcribes her Terms of Communion to her Members, not the Members to her: And therefore if you will be Members, you muſt come up to her Terms. It were the moſt abſurd, unſteady, ridiculous thing in the world, if every man in a Communion may do what he liſt: nor can it be well called

a Communion, where it may so fall out, that whilst one communicates in one thing, and another and another, yet perhaps among five hundred, not ten may communicate in the same thing; it is indeed a contradiction *in adjecto*, a Communion without a Communion. I shall easily grant, what some alledge, That there are different degrees of Communion; but that will do them no service, if they consider who makes and appoints those different degrees. Among the Ancients we read of some, who were *auditores tantum*, only admitted to the Sermons, or Homilies, and the like; and this I think did not properly make them Communicants, but was designed to fit and qualifie them to become such: Some were *orantes*, admitted to the Prayers, and these were really Communicants: Some were admitted to the *Lord's Supper*, and these were plenary Communicants. But still all these were not at the pleasure of the Members themselves, but prescribed or allowed by the Church, according to the capacity or condition of the Persons; but what they were admitted to and present at, they were bound wholly to joyn in, and to every part of it. These things (at least all considered together) I think may be a sufficient Answer to this Objection.

Obj. 2d. *But if this be so, yet* (will some say) *our difficulty is not over. Were it* (say they) *in our power to chuse, it would go far: but we adhere to a Minister, who hath taken the Charge of our Souls; and that in such a time, in such a lawful way, as you your selves do not disallow. The Church assigned these Ministers to us, they are our lawful Pastors, we their Flock; and therefore we are under an obligation not to forsake them.*

Sol. The Answer to this Objection will start a fresh Reason, which (if any regard be had to the sense and practice of the Primitive Times, and the purest and best Ages of the Church) will clearly and undeniably prove, That as matters now stand, Communion in our Parish-Churches is unlawful. For by what ways or means soever they came to be your Ministers, though never so lawfully, they have now Forfeited their Right, cease to be your proper Ministers, and you ought to avoid them as Wolves, and not follow them as Pastors. To make this appear, you ought to consider, That the Head of every perticular Church, or the proper Pastor of the Flock, is the Bishop; to several parts he assigns his Priests and Deacons, who are accountable to him; and he himself is obnoxious to the Censure of the Canons of Provincial or National Synods, and they to Æmmenical. If a Priest or Deacon lawfully assigned to you, rebel against his Bishop, you ought with all speed to forsake him, and adhere to

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your Bishop, and expect his direction and assistance; and if your Bishop himself break the Union of the Church, if you follow him therein, you follow him out of the Church; and therefore in such case you are to leave him, and to apply your selves to other Bishops, who are in the Union and Communion of the Church. Now this is the very case. Our Bishops, who are thrust out of their Sees, are still the true and proper Bishops of those Sees, and to them their respective Flocks ought to pay Obedience. But you have put others in their places, set up Antibishops, and thus have erected Altar against Altar, the very Characteristical note of a *Schismatick* in all Antiquity; And as the Intruders into their Sees are *Schismaticks*, so all who joyn with them and oppose the true Canonical Bishops, thereby make themselves *Schismaticks*. For those, who by joyning in Communion with *Schismaticks*, have made themselves one with those, who have cut themselves off from the Body (which is the case of all Schismaticks) by that very Act have cut themselves off from the Body also: And this all your Bishops, Clergy and Laity have done, by Seperating from the true Bishops, and joyning with the Antibishops in opposition to them: So that if your Prayers were never so justifiable, and the matter of your Communion never so unexceptionable, yet your Communion it self is sinful, as being not only destitute of lawful Authority, but maintained in opposition to it, and therefore *Schismatical* in the highest degree. As having cut off your selves from the Body, you can expect no Influence from Christ the Head, but all your Ordinances are a Snare, and your Blessings are Cursed unto you; and the only way to remove this, is to return to those lawful Canonical Bishops whom you have forsaken. I shall not here urge this further, because it is already sufficiently proved in Print, and would be done further beyond all possibility of any fair Reply, if we might plead our own Cause. But our Adversaries are well aware, that their greatest Strength and best Security lies in silencing our Pens, as well as our Tongues: But let them take heed, for though at present they out-face Men, and brave Heaven, yet God in his time can and will find them out.

Obj. 3*d*. But here some well disposed Persons reply; *What must we do? if Communicate not with them, we have no opportunity of Communion at all; and must we then cast off all Communion?*

Sol. 1*st*. To this I answer in the first place, That if this Argument be good in *England*, why not in *Italy*, or elsewhere? Why may not a *Protestant* at *Rome* go to Mass, or in *Cracovia* communi-

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cate with *Socinians*, in *Geneva* with *Arians*, in *Scotland* with implacable *Presbyterians*, because there he has not opportunity of any other Communion? The Reason is the same, why should the Practice be different, or less allowable in one place than another?

2d. But to answer directly; This objection shews indeed the difficulty some may lie under, and the sad pass the Wickedness of men hath brought matters to, but doth by no means justifie you in any sinful Communion, and therefore let us suppose the worst, that you were really destitute of all opportunity of lawful Communion; why then your case would be much like that of a *Christian* cast upon an uninhabited Coast, only in this something worse, that there he hath no Communion either good or bad, but here you lie continually under the Temptation to a Sinful Communion: Where you have really no opportunity, God will dispense with the Obligation; in such case the diligent performance of all Duties in your power, and the preparation of your Hearts and willingness of Mind to embrace Lawful Church-Communion, when it can be had, will be acceptable to God; but such defects of your state will not warrant you to joyn in any Sinful Communion: for that were to do Evil, that Good may come of it, whose Damnation is just, if we believe the blessed Apostle. When God's people, by the bloody *Heathen* Persecutors, were driven into Wildernesses, Dens, Caves, and all the hiding places they could imagine, you cannot thing that during the sharp Inquisition made after them, there was very much Communion in such places, and yet there were never better *Christians* then in those times.

3d. But then in Conclusion, I desire the Objectors to examine their Hearts seriously, whether many do not out of carnal Interest, or for fear of Danger, start this Objection: For to me it seems plain, that there is opportunity for more to Communicate then do. And therefore laying down this Advice, I shall give you no more trouble, unless any thing hereafter shall be further objected to me.

First; That you would be cautious how you say all opportunity of Communicating is taken away unless in the Parish-Churches. For this is directly to charge all the deprived Clergy with a total neglect of their Duty; and I think their Sufferings are hard enough already, and need not the augmentations of unjust Reproaches and Scandals; and indeed this comes worst of all from them, who seem to be their Friends, and yet at the same time make such untrue Reproaches their own excuse. For if some forbear to exercise their Office, I believe it is more by reason of the backwardness of people to come at them, then

...ion for any unwillingness of mine to receive them.

...Secondly, That you would well consider the Circumstances of things, and act as becomes *Christians* under such Circumstances. Perhaps dangers threaten: What then? As he is not a wise Man who will run headlong into them; So neither deserves he the Name of a *Christian*, who will baulk his Duty for fear of them. It will be therefore your part in such case to encourage Communion, and stand the Shock of threatning Dangers, as becomes good *Christians*. Perhaps the distance of place may be very great; and indeed the number of those, who have stood fast in these apostatizing times, is not so many, and the inveterate malice of mad Zealots so desperately persecutes them in some places, that in many places this may be a material objection: but yet let not this discourage you, [illegible] and fervent with any such certainty, but that sometimes they come among us [illegible] they mean, (if they come home again at all) and that we think it safe to [illegible] two or more to enjoy the true Worship of God, by which we are sure to gain [illegible] and our further improvement in Spiritual Grace, Strength and Comfort. [illegible] false, vain or frivolous Excuses. But if you are really deprived of opportunity [illegible] to keep up your desires after this Communion in Worship, and do what lies in [illegible] and doubt not but that God will accept you at present, and provide better for you [illegible] Sincerity. For in such a case no Communion is more allowable than Spiritual Communion.

...As for my Brethren, I have little to say, they are better able to give Advice [illegible] my self; and indeed both they and I ought to observe the Directions of others, [illegible] not run hastily on our own Heads. For my own part I am willing to do [illegible] Duty, and trust God with the event; and I believe all my Brethren are [illegible] same mind, though perhaps every one is not for the same method. If severe [illegible] sections come, I know no reason why [illegible] any; for I never perceived [illegible] of any Schismatick, but they were [illegible] goods: and we have had a [illegible] Taste of the good nature of theirs, [illegible] think why any should expect [illegible] other then the rest of the [illegible] Supposing some of us should [illegible] fall, yet the Sacrifice may prove the [illegible] more, for Martyrs Blood [illegible] Christian. And I cannot think God will suffer us to be totally destroyed, [illegible] cing Sins of these Nations have brought him to that resolution of exacting [illegible] geance that the Intercession of a *Noah*, a *Daniel*, or a *Job*, shall not prevail [illegible] to correct his People. And if so, then no Good Man need fear how soon he [illegible] Such Examples [illegible] Hope of God, and [illegible] discharge the Ministerial functions. Let us withal remember our Country, and [illegible] naked even our Enemies, but heartily pray, that God would open the Eyes of [illegible] sinful People, to see the Error of their ways and Evil of their doings, and [illegible] their Hearts into Repentance for all, but especially for those crying Sins of [illegible] *Sacrilege*, *Schism*, and more than *barbarous Injustice*, that the Hearts of the [illegible] obedient being turned to the Wisdom of the just, God may be merciful to us [illegible] prevent that speedy Ruin, which otherwise seems to hang over this [illegible] flourishing Church and Kingdom.

FINIS.